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MOLINOS AND THE ITALIAN MYSTICS

THE condemnation of Miguel de Molinos, in 1687, marks a profound change in the attitude of the Church towards Mysticism. It is true that long before, in the classic land of mystic reveries—Spain of the sixteenth century, the Inquisition had clearly seen the dangers of the doctrine which taught that the soul could deal directly with God and which despised the intervention of the priest and the outward observances held by the Church to be essential to salvation. Consequently, in spite of the great mystics, canonized and uncanonized—Santa Teresa, Francisco de Osuna, San Juan de la Cruz, San Pedro de Alcántara, and others who escaped condemnation—it waged unrelenting warfare with the crowd of adepts and performed a service in checking the growth of a tendency which threatened to subordinate religion to hypnotism. In this task it was strengthened by the aberrations of the Illuminati, who claimed that when they reached the desired goal of Union with God, their souls were illuminated with divine light and were abandoned to the divine influence, so that they became impeccable, secure that whatever they did was due to the promptings of God. This abandonment, known to the Spaniards as *Dejamiento* and elsewhere as Quietism, was not likely to lead to evil when practised by Master Eckart, Tauler, Rulman Merswyn, and Henry Suso in the fourteenth century, or by Santa Teresa and St. François de Sales in later times, but, in natures less pure, impeccability was apt to assume the meaning, not that evil was instinctively avoided, but that evil lost its character of sin when wrought under the presumed divine inspiration. The flesh sometimes triumphed over the spirit, even in those who honestly thought themselves to be treading the path of perfection. That spiritual exaltation shared by the two sexes might insensibly become carnal was no new experience, for, in the thirteenth century, the eloquent warning addressed by St. Bonaventura to his brethren shows by the vividness of its details that he must have witnessed more than one such fall from grace.¹ Nor were there lacking impostors who took advantage of these sublimated theories to gratify their brutal instincts with those who were confided to their spiritual guidance, and it was not easy, even

¹ S. *Bonaventurae de Puritate Conscientiae*, cap. 14.

if it were important, to discriminate between the motives leading to such results. This tendency rendered suspicious the mental prayer, the meditation and contemplation, which were the distinguishing exercises of the mystics; it discredited their visions and revelations and served to justify the Spanish Inquisition in its persecution of Mysticism in general.

While Spain was thus active in repression, Rome had remained virtually quiescent. Mysticism had for centuries been recognized as a means to salvation, and its history was too full of names honored by the Church for it to be rashly condemned. There was in Italy no popular mania, as in Spain, to be cured, irrespective of the immoral extravagances to which it sometimes led. In the Edict of Denunciations of the Roman Inquisition, unlike that of the Spanish, there is no mention of Mysticism or Illuminism.¹ The elaborate folios of the systematic writers—Del Bene, Bordono, Lupo, Dandino, Carena—are silent as to its eccentricities. Yet these were by no means unknown to the Holy Office, which took cognizance of them when brought to its notice, and occasionally some book too unreserved in its teachings found a place in the *Index*.² Cardinal Scaglia (†1639), in his little manual of practice, which was circulated only in manuscript, when treating of the troubles customary in nunneries, says that, through giddiness of brain, or vainglory, or illusion, nuns often claim to have celestial visions and revelations and intercourse with God and the saints when, if the confessor is imprudently given to spirituality, he reduces their utterances to writing and, if learned, he defends them with propositions very often punishable by the Inquisition. Sometimes, he adds, sensuality is involved, leading to the assertion that carnal acts are not sinful but meritorious when, if the confessor desires to take advantage of this, he seeks with revelations and false doctrines to prove that they are lawful. Cases of this kind have occurred in the Holy Office, when priests who so justify themselves become liable to the penalties of heresy. Such cases also occur between women assuming to be spiritual and their confessors, who so teach them, even without revelations and visions, leading their spiritual daughters to believe these to be works of merit and mortification.³

Bernino tells us that, early in the seventeenth century, Illuminism was widely diffused throughout Italy, where abjurations en-

¹ Bordoni *Sacrum Tribunal Judicum*, p. 508 (Romae, 1648). Ign. Lupi Bergomens. *Nova Lux in Edictum S. Inquisit.* (Bergomi, 1648.)

² Reusch, *Der Index*, II. 610–611.

³ Scaglia, *Prattica per le Cause del Sant' Officio*, cap. 25 (MS. *penes me*).

forced by the Inquisition were frequent, but this is probably the exaggeration so frequent with heresiologists.¹ A well-marked case, however, startled Florence in 1640, when the Canon Pandolfo Ricasoli, a highly respected member of the noble house of the Barons of Trappola and a man of wide learning and handsome fortune, was arrested, with his chief accomplice Faustina Mainardi, her brother Girolamo, and seven others. Some nuns of Santa Anna sul Prato were also implicated, but if they were prosecuted no knowledge of it was allowed to reach the public. They seem to have formed a coterie of Illuminists to whom Ricasoli taught that all manner of indecent acts conduced to purity, if performed with the mind fixed on God; they claimed special relations with heaven and were free from sin in whatever they did for the greater glory of God. This continued for eight years; rumors spread abroad and were conveyed to the Inquisition, when Ricasoli came forward and denounced himself with expressions of contrition. A public *atto di fede* was held, November 28, 1641, in the great refectory of the convent of Santa Croce, attended by the Grand Duke, the Cardinal de' Medici, the nuncio, and other notabilities. One of the culprits, Serafino de' Servi, had died in prison and appeared in effigy, the rest abjured *de vehementi*—for vehement suspicion of heresy. Ricasoli, Faustina, and the priest Giacomo Fantoni were condemned to perpetual irremissible prison, others to prison with the privilege of asking for pardon, while two, Cocchi and Borgeschi, had a private *atto di fede* and were confined in the Stinche prison at the pleasure of the Inquisition. Ricasoli, as he was led away, declared that he had acted foolishly and ignorantly and he asked pardon of the people for the scandal which he had caused; he lingered in his prison until July, 1657, when he died at the age of 78; there was some question as to his interment, but finally he received Christian burial. The inquisitor, Fra Giovanni Muzarelli, was sternly rebuked for misplaced mercy by the Roman Congregation of the Inquisition and was speedily replaced by one of severer temper.²

Impostors likewise were not unknown, as appears in the career of Francesco Giuseppe Borri, a brilliant but dissolute scion of a noble Milanese house. A misadventure in Rome forced him to take asylum in a church, where, in recognition of the mercy of

¹ Bernino, *Historia di tutte l'Herésie*, IV. 712 (Venezia, 1717).

² Royal Library of Munich, Cod. Ital. 185, pp. 1-7. Library of the Seminario della Curia arcivescovile di Firenze, Chiese, Spogli, Vol. I., pp. 407 *et seqq.* [Modesto Rastrelli], *Fatti attinenti all' Inquisizione*, pp. 173-177 (Venezia, 1782). Cf. Cantù, *Eretici d'Italia*, III. 336.

God, he changed his life. He soon had visions and revelations, from which he constructed a new theology, showing an intimate acquaintance with the mysteries of the Trinity and of the universe. He had been selected to found the Kingdom of the Highest, in which all mankind would be brought under papal rule; the philosopher's stone, of which he had the secret, would furnish the means of raising the papal armies, in the leadership of which he would be guided by St. Michael. Rome soon became dangerous for the new prophet, and in 1655 he transferred his propaganda to Milan, where he founded a secret mystical order, the members of which were trained in meditation and mental prayer, pledged themselves to shed their blood in the execution of the work, and, what was more to the purpose, contributed all their property to the common fund. The Milanese inquisitor got wind of the new sect and arrested some of the members; Borri thought of raising a tumult but decided in favor of the safer alternative of flight. His case was transferred to the Roman Congregation, which cited him, March 20, 1659, to appear within ninety days, and then tried him *in absentia* with the result that his effigy, with all his impious writings, was burnt on January 3, 1661. His dupes were duly prosecuted but seem not to have been severely punished.

Meanwhile he was starting on a fresh career in northern Europe, as a man possessed of all the secrets of alchemy and medicine, with a success that even Cagliostro might have envied. Strassburg and Amsterdam had reason to repent of his seductive arts. In Hamburg, Christina of Sweden furnished him with means to prosecute the work of the Grand Arcanum. Frederick III. of Denmark lavished large sums on him and even made him chief political adviser, which aroused the hatred of the heir-apparent, Christian V., on whose accession in 1670 he was obliged to save his life by flight. He sought to find refuge in Turkey, but in Moravia, when within a day's journey of the frontier, he was arrested by mistake, on suspicion of complicity in a conspiracy in Vienna. There the papal nuncio recognized and claimed him, but Leopold I., whose favor he had speedily acquired by his chemical marvels, only surrendered him on condition that his life should be spared. Before the Inquisition he confessed his errors and attributed them to diabolical inspiration, and his sentence, September 25, 1672, was merely to perpetual prison and certain spiritual penances. Even here his good luck befriended him, for Cardinal d'Estrées, the influential ambassador of Louis XIV., in dangerous illness asked to consult him, and, on recovery, procured his transfer to easier confinement in the castle of St. Angelo, where he was allowed

special privileges. There he remained until his death, August 20, 1695—just a century before Cagliostro came to the same end.¹

Although the Roman Inquisition issued no general denunciations, there was a surveillance kept over the votaries of mental prayer and contemplation, in view of the extravagances to which they might be led when, abandoning themselves wholly to God, they felt themselves irresponsible for what God might cause them to do. There was a little community of this kind formed in Genoa, where they were known as *Sequecre me*, from the phrase used when addressing those whom they elected to join them. Under the lead of a Trinitarian friar, they bought a house in the suburbs, where they lived in the utmost austerity, devoting themselves to contemplation. Then came visions and revelations that the Church was to be reformed through them by a new pope, of whom they were to be the apostles. One of them communicated this to a vicar of the Inquisition, who promptly reported to the tribunal. They were all summoned before it; some went into ecstasies, and as a body they threatened the inquisitor with the vengeance of God and were thrown into prison. The Congregation of the Inquisition ordered their prosecution, which resulted in their being adjudged to be crazy rather than evil-minded. The friar was deprived of active and passive voice in his Order, and the rest were dismissed with threats of the galleys if they reassembled and continued to wear the habit which they had adopted.²

More persistent was the sect known as the Pelagini which, about 1650, developed itself in the Valcamonica and spread throughout Lombardy. Giacomo Filippo di Santa Pelagia was a layman of Milan, highly esteemed for conspicuous piety. From Marco Morosini, Bishop of Brescia (1645-1654), he obtained permission to found conventicles or oratories in the Valcamonica, but it shows that mental prayer was regarded as a dangerous exercise when Morosini imposed the condition that it should not be practised in these little assemblies. The prohibition was disregarded and the devotees largely gave themselves up to contemplation, with the result that they had trances and revelations; they threw off subjection to their priests and were accused of claiming that mental prayer was essential to salvation, that none but Pelagini could be saved, that those who practised it became impeccable, that laymen

¹ Biblioteca del R. Archivio di Stato in Roma, Miscellanea MSS., pp. 577-630. Royal Library of Munich, Cod. Ital. 185, pp. 13-26. *L'Ambasciata di Romolo a' Romani*, p. 689 (Colon., 1676). Collect. Decret. S. Congr. S. Officii, p. 7 (MS. *penes me*). Cantù, *op. cit.*, III. 330.

² MSS. of Ambrosian Library of Milan, H, S, VI., 29, fol. 140.

could preach and hear confessions, that indulgences were worthless, and that God through them would reform the world. In 1654, Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni (afterwards Alexander VIII.) obtained the see of Brescia and by accident discovered some colporteurs distributing the Catechism of Calvin, along with tracts of the Pelagini. In March, 1656, he sent to the Valcamonica three commissioners with verbal instructions and armed with full powers, who temporarily suppressed the oratories and made a number of arrests, but the Inquisition intervened, taking the affair out of his hands and prosecuting the leaders.¹

We hear nothing more of Filippo, except that he never was condemned. He probably died early in the history of the sect and his memory was cherished as that of a saint with thaumaturgic power. In 1686, the Archpriest of Morbegno, in the Valtelline, was found to be distributing relics of him and collecting materials for his life and miracles, all of which he was obliged to abandon, after obeying a summons from Calchi, the Inquisitor of Como. There were also inquiries made of the Provost of Talamona as to his motives in keeping a picture of Filippo and whether it was prayed to.²

After Filippo's disappearance we hear of Francesco Catanei and of the Archpriest Marc Antonio Ricaldini as leaders of the sect, but Agostino Ricaldini, a brother of the latter and a married layman, was really the centre around which it gathered. In Ottoboni's persecution he was imprisoned in 1656, and thrice tortured and, on September 19, 1660, he was sentenced by the Brescia tribunal to exile from the Valcamonica and was relegated to Treviso. Persisting in his errors, he was again tried in Treviso, obliged to abjure *de vehementi*, and sentenced to perpetual prison, while a book which he had written was publicly burnt. How long his imprisonment lasted does not appear, but in 1680 we find him living in Treviso, under surveillance of the episcopal vicar-general.³

If Ottoboni and the Inquisition fancied that they had crushed the sect, they were mistaken. It maintained a secret existence for over twenty years, which enabled it to spread far beyond its original seat and, about 1680, it had associations and oratories for mental prayer established in Brescia, Verona, Vicenza, Treviso, Padua, Pesaro, Lucca, and doubtless many other places, while its votaries

¹ Bernino, *Historia di tutte l'Heresie*, IV. 722-726. MSS. of Ambrosian Library, H, S, VI., 29, fol. 14. This latter is a considerable body of documents from which are derived the facts that follow.

² Ambrosian MSS. *ubi sup.*, fol. 111, 113, 117, 119, 121, 135, 137, 138.

³ *Ibidem*, fol. 58, 61, 66, 80, 83, 86.

expected it to spread through the world. Ricaldini, at Treviso, was busy in corresponding with the heads of the associations and receiving their visits. In Brescia, Bartolommeo Bona, priest of S. Rocco, presided over an oratory of sixty members and was even said to have six hundred souls under his direction. They were called Pellegrini di S. Rocco, they practised mental prayer assiduously, and had even procured an episcopal license for the association. In Verona, Giovanni Battista Bonioli guided a membership of thirty disciples, many of them persons of high consideration. For the most part the devotees seem to have been quiet and pious folk, humbly seeking salvation by the interior way, but there were some who were given to extravagance. Margarita Rossi had visions and revelations, strangely repeating portions of the fantastic theology of Borri and, when written out by a believer, Don Giovanni Antonio, it was not difficult to extract from them a hundred and thirty-four errors, concerning which she was tortured as to intention as well as *in caput alienum*. Two others, Cosimo Dolci and Francesco Nigra, had visions and prophetic insight, for which the latter was sentenced, in 1684, to five years' incarceration.¹

The sect could not continue spreading indefinitely without discovery. In 1682 the Inquisition suddenly awoke to the necessity of action and it repeated an edict which it had issued in 1656, forbidding all oratories and assemblages for mental prayer. Ricaldini felt his position critical, for he had abjured *de vehementi* and was liable to the stake for relapse. He disappeared from Treviso, and all that the Inquisition could learn was that he was somewhere on the Swiss border. At length, in 1684, his retreat was found to be Chiuro, in the Valtelline; and Antonio Ceccotti, Inquisitor of Brescia, made fruitless attempts to induce the authorities of the Valtelline and the Podestà of Brescia to unite in procuring his extradition, but in March, 1685, Ceccotti had the mortification to learn that he had died on the previous October 6, having received all the sacraments and with the repute of a most pious Christian.²

The prominent Pelagini were duly prosecuted, but there seems to have been little vindictiveness felt towards them and little heresy attributable to them. The punishments inflicted were light, for we hear, in 1685, of Bona, one of the leaders, having returned to his district and living in retirement, and of Belleri, another, being in the Valcamonica, where the bishop had appointed him missionary for the whole district. Evidently the disciples must have escaped with a warning. What the ecclesiastical authorities objected to

¹ *Ibidem*, fol. 18, 22, 24, 34, 38-45, 49-51, 53, 54, 61, 81, 91.

² *Ibidem*, fol. 44, 54, 66, 81.

was not Mysticism and its long-accepted practices, but organization, more or less secret, under leaders outside of the hierarchy and free from its supervision, when heated brains, under divine inspiration, indulged in dreams of regenerating the Church. It was not until the case of Molinos had called attention to other dangers that there came from Rome strict orders for the suppression of all oratories and of the practice of mental prayer—that rapture of meditation which had been the distinguishing habit of mystics through the ages.¹

Miguel de Molinos was a Spaniard, born probably about 1630 at Muniesa (Teruel). After obtaining at Coimbra the degree of doctor of theology, he came to Rome in 1665, in connection with a canonization—probably of San Pedro Arbués, who was beatified in 1668. There he speedily acquired distinction as a confessor and spiritual director. Innocent XI. prized him so highly as to give him apartments in the papal palace; the noblest women placed themselves under his care; his reputation spread throughout Italy and his correspondence became enormous. On the day of his arrest it is said that the postage on the letters delivered that day at his house amounted to twenty-three ducats; he made a small charge to cover expenses and, in the sequestration of his property, there were found four thousand gold crowns derived from this source. The letters seized were reported variously as numbering twelve or twenty thousand, of which two hundred were from Christina of Sweden and two thousand from the Princess Borghese. The mysticism which proved so attractive when set forth by his winning personality had in it—ostensibly at least—nothing that had not long since received the approbation of the Church in the writings of the great Spanish mystics and of St. François de Sales. It is true that Molinos dropped the machinery of ecstasies and visions, which loom so largely in the writings of Santa Teresa, and confined his way of perfection to the Brahmanical ideal of the annihilation of sense and intellect, the mystic silence or death, in which speech and thought and desire are no more and in which God speaks with the soul and teaches it the highest wisdom.² This spiritualized hypnotism was in no way original with Molinos, but was the goal which all the mystic saints sought to obtain. To

¹ Ambrosian MSS., *ubi sup.*, fol. 65, 82, 113, 117, 119.

² *Guida Spirituale*, Lib. I., n. 128: "Non parlando, non pensando, non desiderando, si giunge al perfetto silenzio mistico, nel quale Iddio parla con l'anima e à lei si comunica e le insegna nel più intimo fondo la più perfetta e alta sapienza." Cf. Osuna, *Abecedario Spiritual*, P. III., Trat. xxi., Cap. 3, fol. 203. Santa Teresa, *Libro de las Revelaciones*. San Juan de la Cruz, *Subida del Monte Carmelo*, II. vii.

reach it he tells us the soul must abandon itself wholly to God; it must make no resistance to the thoughts or impulses which God might send or allow Satan to send; if assailed by intruding or sensual thoughts, they should not be opposed but be quietly condemned and the resultant suffering be offered as a sacrifice to God.¹ This was the Quietism pure and simple which was subsequently condemned so severely, and there is no question that it had its dangers if the senses were allowed to control the spirit, and the adversaries of Molinos made the most of it, but he taught that the soul must overcome temptation through patience and resignation. When souls have acquired control of themselves, he says, if a temptation attacks them they soon overcome it; passions cannot hold out against the divine strength which fills them, even if the violence is continued and is supported by suggestions of the enemy; the soul gains the victory and enjoys the infinite resultant benefit.²

All this Molinos was allowed to teach for years in the Holy City with general applause. In 1675, at the height of his popularity, he embodied his doctrine in the *Guida Spirituale*, a little volume which came forth with the emphatic approbation of five distinguished theologians—four of them consultors or censors of the Inquisition and all of them men of high standing in their respective Orders of Franciscans, Trinitarians, Jesuits, Carmelites, and Capuchins. The book had an immediate and wide circulation and was translated into many languages. Even in Spain there was a Madrid edition in 1676, one at Saragossa in 1677, and another at Seville as late as 1685, without exciting animadversion. Yet such a career as that of Molinos could not continue indefinitely without exciting hostility, none the less dangerous because prudently concealed. His immense success was provocative of envy and, if mystic contemplation was largely adopted as the surest path to salvation, what was to be the result on the infinite variety of exterior works to which the Church owed so much of its power and wealth? It was found that in many nunneries in Rome, whose confessors had adopted his views, the inmates had cast aside their rosaries and chaplets and depended wholly on contemplation. It was observed that at mass the mystic devotees did not raise their eyes at the elevation of the Host or gaze on the holy images, but pursued uninterruptedly their mental prayer. Molinos gave further occasion for criticism by a tract on daily communion, in which he asserted that a soul, secure that it was not in mortal sin, could

¹ *Guida*, Lib. I., n. 68-70.

² *Ibid.*, Lib. III., n. 3, 40.

safely partake of the sacrament without previous confession—a doctrine which, however theologically defensible, threatened, if extensively practised, largely to diminish the authority of the priesthood, while encouraging the sinner to settle his account directly with God.

To attack as a heretic a man so universally respected and so firmly entrenched as Molinos might well seem desperate, and it is not surprising that the credit for the work was attributed to the Jesuits as the only body daring and powerful enough. The current story is that, having resolved upon it, they procured Père La Chaise to induce Louis XIV. to order his ambassador, Cardinal d'Estrées, to labor unceasingly for the removal of the scandal caused by the teaching of Molinos. Whether this was so is doubtful, but it is certain that the first attack came from the Jesuits and that d'Estrées, who had professed the warmest admiration for Molinos, became his unrelenting persecutor. The campaign was opened in 1678, when Gottardo Bell' Uomo, S. J., issued at Modena a work on the comparative value of ordinary and of mystic prayer, which was duly denounced to the Inquisition. Molinos had been made to recognize in various ways the coming storm, and he sought to conjure it in a fashion which revealed his conscious weakness. February 16, 1680, he addressed to the Jesuit General Oliva a long exculpatory letter. He had not attacked the Society but had always held it in the highest honor; he had never decried the Spiritual Exercises of Loyola, but had recognized the vast good accomplished by them, though he held that, for those suited to it, contemplation was better than meditation. He had for some years been persecuted and stigmatized as a heretic in writing and preaching by the most distinguished members of the Society, but he rejoiced in this and only prayed God for those who reviled him, nor, in his defense of the *Guida*, had he sought aught but the glory of God and, so far from defending the Begghards and Illuminati, he had always condemned them. Evidently the work of the Jesuits in discrediting him had been more active and better organized than the records show, and he thought it wiser to disarm, if possible, rather than to struggle with adversaries so powerful. Oliva's answer of February 28 was by no means reassuring. He complimented Molinos on his Christian spirit in returning good for evil and on the flattering terms bestowed on the Society and its founder. He had never read the books of Molinos and could not speak of them with knowledge but, if they corresponded with his letter, his disciples were doing him great wrong in applying his system of contemplation, of which only the rarest souls were capable, indiscriminately

to nuns and worldly young women. Finally, he could not understand why so distinguished a member of the Society as Padre Bell'Uomo should have been brought before the Congregation of the Index, and he gave infinite thanks to God for defending him before it.

Promptly on the next day, February 29, Molinos replied to this discouraging epistle. At much length he disculpated himself for writings and sayings falsely attributed to him. He held meditation in the highest esteem as an exercise suited to all; the loftiest form of contemplation was a gift of God bestowed on the rare souls fitted for it. He again spoke of the persecution to which he was exposed and, as for Padre Bell'Uomo, whom he did not know, if his doctrine was as sound as represented by Oliva, God would enlighten his ministers to recognize it. Oliva's rejoinder to this, on March 2, would appear to be written in a style of studied obscurity, saying much and meaning little, but one passage reveals a source of Jesuit enmity, in alluding to the number of convents which had passed out of the direction of the Society to practise the new method.¹

The effort of Molinos to propitiate his enemies had only encouraged them by its confession of weakness. Their next step was a dexterous one. Padre Paolo Segneri was not only the most popular Jesuit preacher in Italy, but his favor with Innocent XI. was almost as great as that of Molinos. He was selected as the next athlete and, in 1680, he issued a little volume—*Concordia tra la Fatica e la Quiete nell' Oratione*, in which he argued that the highest life is that which combines activity with contemplation. He was promptly answered by Pietro Matteo Petrucci, an ardent admirer of Molinos, who was rewarded by Innocent with the see of Jesi. Segneri rejoined in a *Lettera di Riposta al Sig. Ignacio Bartalini*, and the controversy was fairly joined. A more aggressive antagonist was the Minorite Padre Alessandro Reggio, whose *Clavis Aurea qua aperiuntur Errores Michaelis de Molinos* appeared in 1682 and boldly argued that the *Guida* revived the condemned errors of the Begghards, that Quietism destroyed all conceptions of the Trinity, while the practice of prayer without works was destructive of all the pious observances prescribed by the Church, and the teaching that temptation should be endured without resistance was dangerous and contrary to Scripture and to the doctors. Petrucci responded vigorously, while Molinos remained silent. He had, at least, the advantage of official support, for Bell'Uomo's book was forbidden *donec corrigatur*; Segneri's *Lettera* and the

¹ Biblioteca Casanatense, MSS., X., v, fol. 231 et seqq.

Clavis Aurea were condemned unconditionally, and Segneri's *Concordia*, while it escaped the *Index*, was quietly forbidden and he was instructed to revise it.¹

The Jesuits, however, were not the only body interested in the downfall of Molinos. There is a curious anonymous tract devoted to explaining what it calls the secret policy of the Quietists, assuming their main object to be the destruction of all the religious Orders and especially of the Dominicans and Franciscans. Apparently taking advantage of the development of the Pelagini about this time, it asserts that the Quietists had organized conventicles and oratories throughout Italy; that they had a common treasury in which 14,000 ducats were found; that they flattered the secular clergy and sought to unite them in opposition to the regulars. In short, Quietism was a deep-laid conspiracy through which Molinos expected to revolutionize the Church and reduce the religious Orders to impotence.² The only importance of the tract is as a manifestation of the attitude of the regulars towards Molinos and of the hostility aroused by his success in winning from them, for his disciples, the directorship of souls which was their special province.

The enormous influence of the elements thus combining for his destruction left little doubt of the result. The first open attack was made in June, 1682, when Cardinal Caraccioli, Archbishop of Naples, a pupil of the Jesuits, reported to the pope that he found his diocese deeply infected with this new Quietism, subversive of the received prescriptions of the Church, and he asked instructions for its suppression, nor was he alone in this, for similar appeals came from other Italian bishops. Molinos was too firmly established in the papal favor for this to dislodge him, but the hostile forces gradually gathered strength and, in November, 1684, the Congregation of the Inquisition formally assumed consideration of the matter. At its head was Cardinal Ottoboni, a fanatic whose experience with the Pelagini, when Bishop of Brescia, had sharpened his hatred of Mysticism. The spirit in which he conducted the inquest is revealed in a memorandum in his handwriting of the points to be elaborated in the next day's meeting of the Congregation: that this heresy is the worst of all and if left alone will become inextinguishable; that it is spreading in Spain through the Archbishop of Seville and in France with many books of the most

¹ Reusch, *Der Index*, II. 612-614. Of these controversial works I have been able to examine only Segneri's *Lettera* and the *Clavis Aurea*. The chief impression made by these polemics is the elusiveness of these mystic dreams when an attempt is made at rigid definition and differentiation.

² Biblioteca Casanatense, MSS., X., iv, 39, fol. 19 *et seqq.*

dangerous nature; that it destroys the Catholic faith and all the religious Orders; that in Jesi the canons and the cura of the cathedral keep a school for its propagation; that a rich and powerful citizen of Jesi threatens the witnesses and that a vigorous commissioner must be sent there; that the monasteries of Faenza and Ravenna are infected and one in Ferrara has a Quietist confessor; that this pestilence calls for fire and steel.¹ In a court presided over by so bitter a prosecutor, the judgment was foreordained.

For awhile the contending forces seem to have been equally balanced, and eight months were spent in gathering testimony sufficient to justify arrest. At last, on July 3, 1685, at a meeting of the Congregation, Cardinal d'Estrées insisted that no one should leave the chamber until the arrest was ordered and executed. This was agreed to; the sbirri were despatched and Molinos was lodged in the prison of the Inquisition.² Yet when, on November 9, the Spanish Holy Office condemned the *Guia Espirituale* as containing propositions savoring of heresy and Illuminism, the Congregation addressed to the pope a vigorous protest against its action on a matter which was still under consideration at headquarters.³

The influence of Queen Christina, we are told, was exerted to procure for Molinos better treatment than was usual with prisoners. Of the details of the trial we know little or nothing, for the secret records of that impenetrable tribunal have never seen the light, but, as torture was habitual in the Roman Inquisition, it is not probable that he was spared. As his books had not been condemned, the evidence employed was drawn exclusively from the immense mass of his correspondence and manuscripts which had been seized, the depositions of witnesses, and his own confessions, so that we are unable to judge how far it justified the conclusions set forth in the sentence, though, from the manner in which it discriminates between what he admitted and what he denied, it is but fair to assume that it represents correctly the evidence before the tribunal. The trial was necessarily prolonged. In his defense interrogatories were forwarded to Saragossa and Valencia, in 1687, where his witnesses were duly examined.⁴ Two hundred and sixty-three erroneous propositions were extracted by the censors from the mass of matter

¹ Bernino, *op. cit.*, IV. 726.

² Biblioteca Casanatense, MSS., X., vii, 46, fol. 289 *et seqq.* This is an account of the affair by one evidently in position to have accurate knowledge of details.

³ Archivo Historico Nacional de España, Inquisicion de Valencia, Legajo 1, n. 4, fol. 164. Archivo General de Simancas, Inquisicion, Legajo 1465, fol. 101.

Archivo Historico Nacional de España, Inquisicion de Valencia, Legajo 12, n. 1, fol. 106.

before them, to which he of course was required to answer in detail, and these seem to have been condensed into nineteen for the consideration of the Congregation.¹

Petrucci was threatened and his elevation to the cardinalate, September 2, 1686, was ascribed to the desire of Innocent to save him from prosecution. Shortly afterward two of the principal assistants of Molinos, the brothers Leoni of Como, of whom Simone was a priest and Antonio Maria was a tailor, were arrested. Then, on February 9, 1687, followed the arrest of the Count and Countess Vespignani, of Paolo Rocchi, confessor of the Princess Borghese and of seventy others, causing general consternation, not diminished by the subsequent imprisonment of some two hundred more. The Congregation was doing its work thoroughly, and it was even said that, on February 13, it appointed a commission which examined the pope himself. A revolution in the traditional standards of orthodoxy could not be effected without compromising multitudes, and the victors were determined that their victory should be complete. On February 15 Cardinal Cibò, the secretary of the Congregation, addressed to all the bishops of Italy a circular stating that in many places there existed or were forming associations called spiritual conferences, under ignorant directors, who with maxims of exquisite perfection misled them into most pernicious errors, resulting in manifest heresy and abominable immorality. The bishops were therefore ordered to investigate and, if such as-

¹ *Trois Lettres touchant l'État présent d'Italie*, pp. 90-120 (Cologne, 1688). These nineteen errors are here printed with their confutations, but without indication of date or of the authority under which they were prepared. They are also contained, with a different series of confutations, in the mass of papers concerning the Pelagiani, in the Ambrosian Library, H, S, VI., 29, fol. 28. This also contains (fol. 30) a series of instructions for detecting the Quietist heresy, consisting of a list of forty-three errors. Some of these set forth so concisely the leading tenets ascribed, with tolerable accuracy, to the Quietists that they are worth presenting here:

21. They seek to annihilate the memory, the intellect, and the will; to remember nothing, to understand nothing, and they say that when they have thus emptied themselves they are refilled by God.

22. They say that God operates in their souls without co-operation; that their spirit is identified with God, so that they are purely passive, surrendering their freewill to God, who takes possession of it.

23. Thus such souls are preserved from even venial sins of advertence and, if they commit some inadvertently, these are not imputed.

24. Also some proceed to claim impeccability, because they cannot sin when God operates in them without their participation.

25. If these souls commit sinful acts, they say it is through the violence of the demon, with the permission of God, for their torment and purgation.

28. Examination of conscience to ascertain if there has been consent to such acts is not expedient, for it distracts introversion and disturbs the quiet of the soul.

semblies were found, to abolish them forthwith, taking moreover especial care that this pestilence was not allowed to infect the monasteries.

There could be but one end to the trial. Every possible accusation was brought against Molinos, even to a foolish, self-laudatory speech made to the sbirri who arrested him, and his admiring certain anagrams made of his name. He seems to have responded with candor to the various articles, denying some and admitting others. Of the articles, the most important were his justifying the sacrilege of breaking images and crucifixes; depreciating religious vows and dissuading persons from entering religious Orders, saying that vows destroyed perfection; that, by the prayer of Quiet, the soul is rendered not only sinless but impeccable, for it is deprived of freedom and God operates it, wishing us sometimes to sin and offend him, and the demon moves the members to indecent acts; that the three ways of the spirit, hitherto described by the doctors, are absurd and that there is but one, the interior way; that he had formed conventicles of men and women and permitted them to perform immoral acts and to eat flesh on fast-days. He admitted excusing the breaking of images; he denied depreciation of solemn vows, but admitted it as respects private ones, and he had only dissuaded from entering religion those whom he knew would create scandal. He denied teaching that in Quietism the soul becomes impeccable, but only that it did not consent to the act of sin; and he said that he knew many persons practising it who lived many years without committing even venial sin. He denied also that Quietism deprived the soul of freewill, but said that, in that perfect union with God, it was God who worked and not the faculties, and when he said that God sometimes wished sin, he meant material sin; that the demon, as God's instrument to mortify the flesh and purify the soul, causes sometimes the hand and other members to perform lascivious acts. He denied condemning the three ways of the spirit, having meant only that the interior way was so much more perfect that the others were negligible by comparison. He denied forming conventicles in which lascivious acts were permitted and he had excluded some persons who would not refrain from them. He admitted eating flesh on prohibited days, but said that this was by license of his physician. He confessed that for many years he had practised the most indecent acts with two women, the details of which need not be repeated; he had not deemed this sinful, but a purification of the soul and that in them he enjoyed a closer union with God; these were merely acts of the senses, in which the higher faculties had no part, as they were united with God. When he was

told that these were propositions heretical, bestial, and scandalous, he replied that he submitted himself in all things to the Holy Office, recognizing that its lights were superior to his own.¹

A sentence of condemnation was inevitable. It was drawn up, August 20, 1687; on the twenty-eighth an inquisitorial decree was signed, embodying sixty-eight propositions, drawn from the evidence and confessions, which were condemned as heretical, suspect, erroneous, scandalous, blasphemous, offensive to pious ears, subversive of Christian discipline, and seditious; they were not to be taught or practised under pain of deprivation of office and benefice and perpetual disability, and of an anathema reserved to the Holy See. All the writings of Molinos, in whatever language, were forbidden to be printed, possessed, or read; and all copies were, under the same penalties, to be surrendered to the inquisitors or bishops, who were to burn them.² This was posted in the usual places on September 3, the day fixed for the *atto di fede* in which Molinos was to appear.

Under a heavy guard he was brought, on the previous evening, from the inquisitorial prison to the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, in which the *atto* was to be celebrated. In the morning, in a room next to the sacristy, he was exhibited to some curious persons of distinction, eliciting from him an expression of indignation, construed as indicating how little he felt of real repentance. This was confirmed by what followed, explicable possibly by Spanish imperturbability, but more probably by the Quietism which led him to regard himself as the passive instrument of God's will, and superbly indifferent to whatever might befall him, so long as his soul was rapt in the joys of the mystic death, which he had taught as the *summum bonum*. Called upon to order a meal, he specified one which in quantity and quality might satisfy the most voracious gourmet, and after partaking of it he lay down to a refreshing siesta, until he was roused to take his place on the platform, where, in spite of his manacles, his bearing was that of a judge and not of a convict.

The vast church was thronged to its farthest corner with all that was noble in Rome, including twenty-three cardinals; and the spa-

¹ Biblioteca Casanatense, MSS., X., vii, 45, fol. 289. I cannot but regard this as a truthful report. It accords with the briefer abstract in the final sentence, which distinguishes between the articles proved by witnesses and denied by Molinos and those which he admitted. Reusch (*Der Index*, II. 617-618) states that the sentence has been printed in the *Analecta Juris Pontificii*, 6, 1653, and in the appendix to Francke's translation of the *Guida Spirituale*, published in 1687. I have a copy from the Royal Library of Munich, Cod. Ital. 185, and there is one in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Italien, 138, which also contains the 263 articles drawn from his correspondence, with his answers.

² D'Argentré, *Collect, Judic. de Novis Erroribus*, III., II., 357-362.

cious piazza in front and all the neighboring streets were crowded. An indulgence of fifteen days and fifteen quarantines had been proclaimed for all in attendance, but in Rome, where plenary indulgences could be had on almost every day in the year by merely visiting churches, this could not account for the eagerness which brushed aside the Swiss guards stationed at the portals, requiring a reinforcement of troops and resulting in considerable bloodshed. As the long sentence was read, with its detail of Molinos's enormities, occupying two hours, it was interrupted with the frequent roar of "Burn him! Burn him!" led by an enthusiastic cardinal and echoed by the mob outside. Through all this, we are told, his effrontery never failed him, which was reckoned as an infallible sign of his persistent perversity. The sentence concluded by declaring him convicted as a dogmatizing heretic, but, as he had professed himself repentant and had implored mercy and pardon, it ordered him to abjure his heresies and to be rigidly imprisoned with the *sanbenito* for life, without hope of release, and to perform certain spiritual exercises. This was duly executed, and he lingered, it was said repentant, until his death, December 28, 1696. The day after the *atto di fede* his disciples performed their abjuration. There was no desire to deal harshly with them, and they were dismissed with trivial penances, except the brothers Leoni. Simone the priest, who had been a popular confessor, was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment; Antonio Maria, the tailor, who had been a travelling missionary and organizer, was incarcerated for life. There was still another victim, the secretary of Molinos, Pedro Peña, arrested May 9, 1687, for defending his master. He was fully convicted of Quietism and, on March 16, 1689, he was condemned to lifelong prison.¹

There still remained the publication to Christendom of the new position assumed by the Holy See toward Mysticism. The sixty-eight propositions, condemned in the inquisitorial decree of August 28, were printed in the vernacular and placed on sale, but were speedily suppressed. There must still have been opposition in the Sacred College, or on the part of Innocent XI., for the bull *Coelestis*

¹ The account of the *atto di fede* is derived from the Casanatense MSS., X., vii, 45, and a relation printed by Laemmer, *Meletematum Romanorum Mantissa*, pp. 407 *et seqq.*, who also prints (pp. 412-422) the sentence of Pedro Peña.

The contemporary printed sources of the whole affair are *Trois Lettres touchant l'État présent d'Italie*, Cologne, 1688; *Recueil de diverses pièces concernant le Quétisme et les Quétistes*, Amsterdam, 1688; and Bernino, *Historia di tutte l'Heresie*, IV. 711 *et seqq.* The concise account by Reusch (*Der Index*, II. 611 *et seqq.*) is written with his accustomed thoroughness and careful use of all accessible sources. John Bigelow's *Molinos the Quietist* (New York, 1882) is a popular narrative which rejects the charges of immorality. See also Heppe, *Geschichte der quietistischen Mystik*, pp. 110 *et seqq.*, 260 *et seqq.* (Berlin, 1875).

Pastor was not drawn up and signed until November 20, and was not finally published to the world until February 19, 1688. This recited the same series of propositions and the condemnation of Molinos and confirmed the decree of August 28. The propositions condemned consisted, for the most part, of the untenable extravagances of Quietism, including impeccability and the sinlessness of acts committed while the soul was absorbed with God, but it was impossible to do this without condemning much that had been taught and practised by the mystic saints, and there were no saving clauses to differentiate lawful from unlawful converse of the soul with its Creator. The Church broke definitely with Mysticism and by implication gave the faithful to understand that salvation was to be sought in the beaten track, through the prescribed observances and under the guidance of the hierarchical organization.¹

This change of front was emphasized in various ways. Innocent's favor saved Cardinal Petrucci from formal prosecution. To the vexation of the Inquisition, his case was referred to four cardinals, Cibò, Ottoboni, Casanate, and Azzolini; he professed himself ready to retract whatever the pope objected to and, though the Inquisition held an abjuration to be necessary, he was not required to make it; he was relegated to Jesi and then recalled to Rome, where he was kept under surveillance. He could not, moreover, escape the mortification of seeing the books, which had been so warmly approved, condemned by a decree of February 5, 1688. Many other works, which had long passed current as recognized aids to devotion, were similarly treated: those of Benedetto Biscia, Juan Falconi, François Malaval, and of numerous others—even the *Opera della divina Gratia* of the Dominican Tommaso Menghini, himself Inquisitor-general of Ferrara and author of the *Regole del Tribunal del Santo Officio*, which long remained a standard guide in the tribunals. What had been accepted as the highest expression of religious devotion had suddenly become heresy.² Apparently it was not until May, 1689, that instructions were sent everywhere to demand the surrender of all books of Molinos and to report any one suspected of Molinism.³

Persecution received a fresh impulse when Cardinal Ottoboni, as Alexander VIII., succeeded Innocent XI., October 6, 1689. Bernino tells us that he appeared to him an angel in looks and an apostle in utterance when he declared that there was no creature in

¹ Innocentii PP. XI. Bull *Coelestis Pastor* (Bullar., X. 212).

² Reusch, *Der Index*, II. 618. *Index Innoc. XI.*, Append., pp. 7, 28, 45, 47 (Romae, 1702).

³ MSS. of Ambrosian Library, H, S, VI., 29, fol. 67 *et seqq.*

the world so devoid of sense as a heretic, for, as he was deprived of faith, so also was he of reason. His first care was to remove from office and throw into irremissible prison every one who was in the slightest degree suspected of Molinism; in this he did not even spare his Apostolic camera, for he arrested an Apostolic Prothonotary, and, although in the Congregation of the Inquisition there were four kinsmen of the prisoner, zeal for the faith preponderated over blood.¹ Fortunately his pontificate lasted for only sixteen months, so that he had but limited opportunity for the gratification of his ardent fanaticism and scandalous nepotism.

In spite of all this, there were still found those who indulged their sensual instincts under cover of exalted spirituality. In 1698 there was in Rome the case of a priest named Pietro Paolo di San Giov. Evangelista who had already been tried by the tribunals of Naples and Spoleto, so that his career must have been prolonged; while references to a Padre Benigno and a Padre Filippo del Rio show that he was not alone. He had ecstasies and a following of devotees; he taught that communion could be taken without preliminary confession and that, when the spirit was united with God, whatever acts the inferior part might commit were not sins. He freely confessed to practices of indescribable obscenity with his female penitents, whom he assured afterward that they were as pure as the Blessed Virgin. He was sentenced to perpetual prison without hope of release and to a series of arduous spiritual penances, while Fra Benigno escaped with seven years of imprisonment.²

Another development of the same tendencies—probably a survival of the Pelagini—was discovered in Brescia in 1708. The sectaries called themselves disciples of St. Augustin, engaged in vindicating his opinions on predestination and grace, but they were popularly known as Beccarellisti, from two brothers, priests of the name of Beccarelli, whom they regarded as their leaders. For twenty-five years—that is, since the ostensible suppression of the Pelagini—the sect had been secretly spreading itself throughout Lombardy, where it was said to number some forty-two thousand members, including many nobles and wealthy families and ecclesiastics of position. They had a common treasury and a regular organization, headed by the elder Beccarelli as pope, with cardinals, apostles, and other dignitaries. The immediate object of the movement we are told was to break the power of the religious Orders and to restore to the secular priesthood the functions of confession and

¹ Bernino, *op. cit.*, IV. 727–728.

² Royal Library of Munich, Cod. Ital. 209, fol. 67 *et seqq.* Cf. Phelippeaux, *Relation du Quiétisme*, II. 117, 154.

the direction of souls which it had well-nigh lost, but there was taught the Quietist doctrine of divine grace to which the devotee surrendered all his faculties. This was allowed to operate without resistance, and Beccarelli held that Molinos was the only true teacher of Christian perfection; but we may safely reject as exaggeration the statement that carnal indulgence was regarded as earning a plenary indulgence, applicable to souls in purgatory. Cardinal Badoaro, then Bishop of Brescia, took every means to stamp out this recrudescence of the condemned doctrines; the leaders scattered to Switzerland, Germany, and England; while Beccarelli was tried by the Inquisition at Venice and was condemned to seven years of galley-service.¹

Probably the latest victims who paid with their lives for their belief in the efficacy of mental prayer and mystic death were a Beguine named Geltruda and a friar named Romualdo, who were burned in a Palermitan *atto di fede*, April 6, 1724, as impenitent Molinists, after languishing in jail since 1699.²

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¹ Laemmer, *op. cit.*, p. 427. Heppe, *Geschichte der quietistischen Mystik*, p. 445.

² Mongitore, *L'Atto pubblico di Fede celebrato a 6 Aprile, 1724* (Palermo, 1724).